United Nations DP/2016/13

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

Distr.: General
4 April 2016

Original: English

Annual session 2016
6-10 June 2016, New York
Item 7 of the provisional agenda
Evaluation

Annual report on evaluation, 2015

Summary

This report summarizes the key elements of the annual report on evaluation in 2015, and provides a brief overview of the work of the Independent Evaluation Office in fulfilling its evaluation functions as outlined in the UNDP evaluation policy. It also presents the planned programme of work for the Office for 2016 and 2017. The full annual report on evaluation, with detailed analysis of results, will be submitted to the Executive Board in advance of the 2016 annual session

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of this summary and of the full annual report; (b) request UNDP to address the issues raised; and (c) approve the programme of work and budget for the Independent Evaluation Office for 2016 and for 2017 (proposed).

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Introduction

1. This annual report on evaluation is presented to the UNDP Executive Board by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, pursuant to the provisions of UNDP evaluation policy. The report covers the work and budget of the Office in 2015, and presents a costed programme of work for 2016 and a proposed one for 2017, in accordance with its Board-approved evaluation plan, 2013-2017.

I. Independent Evaluation Office activities

2. This first section of the report contains an account of the thematic and country-level evaluations undertaken by the Office, followed by a summary of support to other institutional activities such as the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and to evaluation capacity development. For the first time, this report contains a summary of UNDP performance with respect to the evaluation dimension of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender. It concludes with a summary of the 2015 budget and human resources in the Office.

A. Evaluations

Thematic evaluations

3. In 2015, the Office completed four thematic evaluations that were presented to the Executive Board for discussion and decisions. These were *the UNDP contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment, the UNDP contribution to mine action, the role of UNDP in supporting the national achievement of the Millennium Development Goals*, and *the contribution of global and regional human development reports to public policy*. Both the Millennium Development Goals and human development reports evaluations were reported on in the 2014 annual report on evaluation. The following paragraphs briefly indicate the context and key conclusions of the gender and mine action evaluations.

UNDP contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment, 2008-2013

4. Gender equality remains a crucial and unfulfilled human right which, together with the empowerment of women, has been a major theme in global commitments since the 1970s. UNDP has been at the forefront in responding to these developments and in the 1990s adopted gender mainstreaming for all its activities. In 2007, UNDP developed its gender equality strategy, 2008-2013, in response to the first independent evaluation of UNDP performance in promoting gender equality. That strategy had two components, the first covering 'development results' in the four focus areas (poverty and the Millennium Development Goals, democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, and environment and energy) and the second examining 'institutional results' in the areas of coordination and management.

5. Assessing progress in attaining gender equality and promoting women's empowerment is complex and multi-layered since it encompasses dimensions of cultural context and values, power relationships, accelerators of progress, and issues of sustainability and backlash. To permit deeper analysis of the effectiveness of UNDP results and the type of gender change achieved, the evaluation developed two analytical frameworks. The first was the 'gender results effectiveness scale', which consists of a five-point scale moving from *gender negative* results towards *gender transformative* results. The second drew on the Gender@Work quadrants, which categorize four types of change: individual change, formal change, informal change and systemic change. In terms of institutional results, the evaluation assessed UNDP performance with respect to planning and resources; innovation to promote gender mainstreaming; deployment of the 'gender marker'; gender parity and organizational culture; accountability and oversight measures; knowledge management and communication; and United Nations system collaboration on gender.

6. The evaluation found that there had been far-reaching change and marked improvement in the UNDP approach to and implementation of policies to address gender mainstreaming. The gender equality strategy was catalytic and promoted a number of innovative instruments (notably the Gender

Steering and Implementation Committee and the 'gender equality seal'). These achievements notwithstanding, the evaluation also concluded that UNDP had yet to promote and fully resource gender equality as a priority to be upheld as a point of departure for all its engagements. Very few of the gender results were found to be *gender transformative*, addressing the root causes of inequalities. The majority of results were *gender targeted*, meaning they tabulated the number of women and men involved. An exception was in the area of democratic governance where results were *gender responsive*, addressing the different needs of men and women and the equitable distribution of benefits. The evaluation concluded that gender analysis needed to become mandatory in all programming and be linked with the gender marker rating of each intervention.

UNDP contribution to mine action

7. Since 1999, when the Ottawa Convention went into force, there has been substantial progress in the mine action arena. One key measure of progress has been the global incidence rate of casualties, which has declined to one-third the 1999 rate of some 25 casualties per day. While removal of landmines is not typically associated with UNDP development work, the organization has been a crucial partner in landmine removal in over 40 countries, with some programmes dating back nearly 30 years. Most UNDP mine action support focuses on establishing an enabling environment for landmine and cluster munition removal, in particular helping to build the capacities of national governments.

8. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the UNDP contribution to mine action had strengthened national institutional capacities to deliver services that reduce vulnerability, enable equitable development, advance the rights of people with disabilities, and support compliance with relevant international treaties.

9. Overall, the evaluation concluded that UNDP mine action work was helping reduce fear and improve the quality of life in many communities. The organization is viewed as a neutral and reliable partner that has facilitated and channelled international funding, with extensive country-level knowledge, proven experience and comparative advantages in providing institutional support. In over a dozen countries, it has contributed substantially to institutional mine action capacity. UNDP has sought to frame its support in terms of poverty reduction. In most villages visited, there was some evidence of improvement in the standard of living, though the extent to which this was a direct result of demining efforts was difficult to quantify. Since 2008, however, the profile of mine action within the UNDP strategic framework has declined, and the temporary closing of the mine action global programme has caused uncertainty among stakeholders as to the long-term strategic engagement of UNDP in this area. The evaluation underscores the crucial role that UNDP is playing and finds it compelling for UNDP to continue its work and tie its mine action efforts more closely to other development programming so that affected communities may also receive improved government services, better infrastructure and greater economic opportunities.

Assessments of development results

10. This section contains a summary of the assessments of development results conducted during the course of 2015 and highlights common issues and strategic concerns with respect to UNDP performance at the country level that emanate from an analysis of individual assessments. Second, it provides an update of progress achieved in terms of implementing reforms to the assessments and summarizes remaining challenges.

11. The Independent Evaluation Office undertook eight assessments in 2015 – in Albania, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Gabon, Mauritania, Morocco, Sao Tome and Principe, and Viet Nam. Additionally, assessments for Somalia and Zimbabwe were completed. The assessments confirmed that UNDP interventions were relevant and aligned with national development priorities. Some insights and common issues highlighted in the 2015 assessments are summarized below.

UNDP added value in middle-income country interventions

12. Several assessments were conducted in middle-income countries (Albania, the Dominican Republic, Gabon, Morocco, and Viet Nam). They revealed that in these counties, UNDP continues to

be well positioned, and its work often yields critical development results and useful policy lessons. In the Dominican Republic there was broad recognition of UNDP added value in promoting political dialogue and as a facilitator of public policies focusing on sustainable human development and human rights. In Morocco, UNDP was considered a longstanding, trusted, credible and responsive partner with convening power. In the view of partners, UNDP competencies in project management and contributions to capacity development constituted its greatest value added.

13. A particular challenge faced when countries transition to middle-income status is the associated reduction in official development assistance, which often affects the scope of UNDP services. A case in point is the work of UNDP in Gabon, whose middle-income status has meant comparatively low official development assistance, and where weakening oil prices have reduced government revenues. Constraints on international and domestic funding have led to a diminished UNDP country office programme portfolio and technical capacity. Other examples include Albania and the Dominican Republic, where limited funding necessitates a greater optimization of resources. In Sao Tome and Principe, programme relevance is constrained by structural dependence on two major sources of funding, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Global fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

14. In some countries that have transitioned to middle-income status, UNDP has been able to refocus its country programming to remain relevant. In Viet Nam, following the attainment of middle-income status in 2010, UNDP responded to the emerging needs by applying upstream policy-oriented approaches. In Albania, UNDP programmes have been aligned with national European Union accession priorities, and have drawn attention to crucial gaps in social inclusion and youth employment.

15. Promotion of best practices, high-quality policy advisory services, and innovation in interventions are critical for UNDP support to middle-income countries. Assessments of development results stress that UNDP interventions need to become even more innovative, and urge UNDP not to confine its role to that of 'fund manager'. The assessments add that UNDP needs to strengthen its intellectual and technical leadership and advocacy work, so that it can continue to be a leading voice in development debates at all levels.

Delivering as one

16. In Albania and Viet Nam (two out of eight countries where 'delivering as one' pilots have been essayed) the UNDP programmes stem from the overall 'One United Nations' initiative or 'programme of cooperation' frameworks, where multiple United Nations partners contribute to the achievement of thematic outcomes. In Albania, under the current programme of cooperation, UNDP shares both outcomes and outputs with other partners. Although the 'delivering as one' modality has not led to increased resources, UNDP has demonstrated programmatic synergy with other United Nations organizations. In Albania, however, the 'delivering as one' modality was found to contain a degree of fragmentation in implementation, causing increased workload and unnecessary duplication among programmes. In Viet Nam, under the One United Nations initiative, UNDP has led the work of various joint programme groups, such as governance, climate change, and inclusive and equitable economic growth. While tripartite partnership structures are in place, further work is needed to strengthen stakeholder partnerships. In Ethiopia – a delivering as one 'self-starter' since 2008 – the assessment noted UNDP leadership in the roll-out of a business operations strategy and other operations-focused joint initiatives that demonstrated cost savings.

UNDP strategic positioning: longer-term strategy and sustainable interventions

17. Many of the assessments stressed the need for long-term strategies and approaches that could generate transformational and sustainable development results. In Mauritania, in the absence of an overall strategy or vision, UNDP has supported individual actions and processes, including small-scale infrastructure development, without truly strengthening capacities or addressing structural issues. Sustainability of interventions was also found to be weak. Similarly, in Ethiopia, the assessment recommended well-defined exit strategies at the outset to enhance sustainability. In Albania, the short-term nature of interventions was found to have hindered the momentum required to

achieve and sustain transformational results. In Viet Nam, the assessment recommended that UNDP shift to a more programme-focused approach. In Zimbabwe, it commended recent joint efforts of the UNDP team with the national government, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization and other partners, to launch a long-term national programme aimed at improving food security and building greater resilience to extreme climate events.

Small Grants Programme

18. Two joint UNDP-GEF evaluations were completed in 2015. One focused on the GEF Small Grants Programme, which is administered by UNDP. GEF created the Small Grants Programme in 1992, with the explicit aim of developing community-led and community-owned strategies and technologies for reducing threats to the global environment while addressing livelihood challenges. The principal strategy of the programme is to provide small grants—up to a maximum of $50,000—to needy communities to support the use of practices and technologies that benefit the global environment. Since start-up, the programme has provided over 18,000 grants to communities in more than 125 countries.

19. The evaluation covered the period 2008 to 2014 (a previous joint evaluation was conducted in 2008). The evaluation examined the current role of the Small Grants Programme and the extent to which it has contributed to achieving global environmental benefits while addressing livelihoods, poverty, and gender; broader adoption of Small Grants Programme outcomes at the local level and beyond; the strategic positioning of the programme; and efficiency issues, with particular attention to upgrading country programmes and related policies, and monitoring and evaluation, in Small Grants Programme countries.

20. The evaluation concluded that Small Grants Programme projects are effective, efficient and relevant, but the global longer-term vision of the programme has not been updated. Upgrading and related policies have resulted in increased resources but have also brought challenges. Notably, the criteria for selection of countries for upgrading should be revisited. Small Grants Programme governance and management structures have been adequate but are increasingly strained by an ever more rapidly changing context. The added value of UNDP as GEF administrator, are not clearly articulated. UNDP should ensure that the Small Grants Programme is implemented under a single, coherent, global programme framework. With guidance from the GEF secretariat, UNDP and the GEF Central Programme Management Team should continue to strengthen and streamline monitoring and evaluation.

UNDP-GEF support to protected areas and protected area systems

21. Since 1991, in collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank, GEF has provided $4.8 billion in grants and has mobilized an additional $17.9 billion in co-financing from public, multilateral, and private sources to 1,167 projects supporting countries in biodiversity conservation initiatives. These investments have largely supported interventions in non-marine protected areas, non-marine protected area systems, and adjacent landscapes.

22. The independent evaluation offices of GEF and UNDP undertook a joint evaluation that covered relevant operations supported by GEF through all its partners. It assessed the impact of GEF investments in non-marine protected areas and systems, and sought to answer three broad questions: (a) what were the effects and contributions of GEF support in biodiversity conservation in non-marine protected areas and their immediately adjacent landscapes? (b) What were the contributions of GEF support to the broader adoption of biodiversity management measures at the country level? and (c) Which GEF-supported projects were most significant in enabling or hindering the achievement of biodiversity management objectives? The evaluation used a mix of quantitative, qualitative, and spatial methods in data collection and analysis. The three major analytical components were portfolio analysis, global analysis, and case study analysis. For the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, this constituted the first impact evaluation of UNDP programming, building on an earlier thematic evaluation focused on the nexus linking poverty and environmental protection support to countries.

23. The evaluation concluded that GEF support is contributing to biodiversity conservation by helping reduce habitat loss, noting that GEF strategies have increasingly targeted development

pressures in areas adjacent to protected areas. GEF and its partners, including UNDP, have helped build capacities that address key factors affecting biodiversity conservation in protected areas, and have helped to improve biodiversity governance in supported protected area systems.

B. Institutional activities and evaluation advocacy

Evaluation Advisory Panel

24. In 2013, to enhance credibility and transparency, the Independent Evaluation Office established an evaluation advisory panel composed of 11 international experts in development and evaluation. In 2015, the work of the panel deepened as members provided guidance and intellectual insights to the director and evaluation managers of the Office. Along with support to individual evaluations, an 'evaluation advisory panel week' was held in May, with a programme structured around several topics including big data, complexity, and unintended outcomes. Strategic sessions focused on ongoing evaluations and other initiatives central to the programme of work of the Office. Panel members engaged directly with UNDP management and Executive Board members to gather feedback, exchange information, and provide practical and strategic suggestions with a view to strengthening the evaluation function. Throughout the year, individual panel members conducted 'external expert peer reviews', ensuring that all evaluation teams receive feedback on draft evaluations at key junctures.

Evaluation Resource Centre

25. The Evaluation Resource Centre is a publicly accessible online repository and databank of all UNDP evaluations, managed by the Independent Evaluation Office. It allows the public to better understand UNDP and how it performs, and facilitates UNDP efforts to strategically plan and effectively use evaluations for accountability, management for results, and knowledge management. The Centre was developed in 2002 with the goal of sharing all UNDP evaluations along with their plans, terms of reference, and management responses globally. It contains over 3,500 evaluation reports.

26. The Office has periodically upgraded the Evaluation Resource Centre, keeping up with new technologies and platform capabilities. Several new features and modifications were added in 2015 to enhance the Centre, making it more user-friendly. The upgraded version went live on 1 March 2016.

Communication and outreach

27. The Independent Evaluation Office continued its efforts to widen the reach and improve the dissemination of its evaluation products. A revamped website was launched in 2012. Facebook and Twitter accounts were set up in 2013, (the latter now has 3,000 followers). In 2015, the Office introduced thematic illustrative summaries, which improved readability. Its reports are now disseminated through the Internet, social media, and newsletters to a broad range of audiences. Website analytics show an upward trajectory of visits to the website of the Office, almost tripling since 2012.

Support to national evaluation capacity development

28. The Fourth International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 26 to 30 October 2015. One of the largest and most internationally diverse evaluation events of the year, the conference drew 450 participants from 100 countries. The event was co-hosted by the Independent Evaluation Office and the Government of Thailand, with additional support from the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. UNDP was well represented, with high-level participation from headquarters, regional bureaus and country offices. It was the first such conference where UNDP formally partnered with a professional evaluation association – the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) – bringing expertise from civil society, academia and the research community. Three of the international evaluation networks were represented at the conference: UNEG, the Evaluation Coordination Group of the multilateral development banks, and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD-DAC). Most participants covered their own conference fees and travel costs, so that sufficient revenue was generated to cover most of the conference costs.

29. The national evaluation capacities conference programme was designed to draw both from the experience of national evaluation and policy entities, and from other evaluation practitioners and experts from IDEAS and the United Nations. The conference served as a forum to present and exchange lessons, experiences and perspectives in conducting and using evaluations and developing national evaluation capacities. Discussions were held on the status of evaluation capacities in various countries and follow-up on the 18 commitments of the national evaluation capacities conference, 2013, in Brazil. The conference provided a venue for the promotion of cooperation among countries to strengthen national evaluation systems and practices. As an input to this dimension, the Independent Evaluation Office, in collaboration with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, developed a baseline study called *Insight on National Evaluation Capacities in 43 Countries* documenting the current state of national evaluation capacities and institutional set-ups in the 43 UNDP programme countries signatories to the 18 national evaluation capacities commitments agreed at the 2013 conference.

30. What emanated from the 2015 conference was a rich dialogue on developing national evaluation capacities to tackle the challenge of monitoring indicators and evaluating the sustainable development goals. The conference concluded with the endorsement of the Bangkok Declaration, a document capturing an emerging body of shared understanding on evaluation principles and priorities to help guide joint and cooperative action in future national evaluation capacity development, in support of the sustainable development goals.

Support to the United Nations Evaluation Group

31. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) is a voluntary professional association of 46 United Nations funds, programmes, specialized agencies and affiliated organizations. The UN-Women Director of the Independent Evaluation Office serves as the UNEG chair (2015-2017), and the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office serves as one of the vice-chairs. The UNEG strategy, 2014-2019, has four strategic areas of focus: (a) evaluation functions and products that uphold UNEG norms and standards; (b) evaluation in support of accountability and programme learning; (c) United Nations system-wide initiatives and emerging demands; and (d) the principle that UNEG benefits from and contributes to an enhanced global evaluation profession.

32. A major focus was on the celebration of the International Year of Evaluation (2015), and advocacy of evaluation in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The year was selected as the International Year of Evaluation in General Assembly resolution 69/237, and the global evaluation community celebrated the Year by advocating and promoting evaluation and evidence-based policymaking. An 'evaluation torch' was passed at over 80 events organized by the global evaluation community. The Independent Evaluation Office, UNEG and other partners were actively engaged in these activities. A key achievement in advocacy was the inclusion of evaluation in Agenda 2030, in which UNEG played a critical role advocating the importance of evaluation during the intergovernmental negotiations.

33. The Office has consistently provided technical and financial services to UNEG. In 2015, the Director continued serving as the UNEG vice-chair responsible for work related to strengthening evaluation functions, including updating UNEG norms and standards, which were developed in 2005; updating the 2008 evaluation technical competencies; and conducting peer reviews in three member organizations (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the International Trade Centre and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). Staff participated in the work of various UNEG working groups, including the sustainable development goals and evaluation working groups, and a newly formed decentralized evaluation group.

34. The Office hosted the UNEG secretariat, at an approximate cost of $291,931 for staff (a full-time P3 Programme Specialist, 20 per cent staff time of a P5 Executive Coordinator, and 5 per cent staff time of a P3 information technology specialist and a P4 operations specialist). Additional costs were *incurred for office space and operating expenses.*

UNDP evaluation in the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

35. Since 2012 the Independent Evaluation Office has provided inputs to the annual System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the extent to which UNDP evaluations approach or meet requirements in terms of integrating gender into evaluation. In accordance with UNEG guidance, the Office commissioned a meta-evaluation of 25 evaluation reports. The sample included nine independent and 17 decentralized evaluation reports. Evaluations were coded according to the four criteria (0 = missing requirements, 1 = approaching requirements, 2 = meets requirements, and 3 = exceeds requirements). Evaluation results were coded using the gender results effectiveness scale. For the second year, the composite score for all 25 reports was 'approaches requirements', signalling that attention should be paid to this issue if UNDP performance is to move towards the highest rating, 'exceeds requirements'.

C. Decentralized evaluation

36. In 2015, 90 UNDP country offices (66 per cent) commissioned a total of 241 evaluations: 39 outcome evaluations, 183 project evaluations, and 19 United Nations Development Assistance Framework and other programmatic evaluations. Of the 241 evaluations commissioned, 90 (37 per cent) focused on GEF-funded projects. GEF requires terminal (end-of-project) evaluations for all large and medium-sized GEF projects that UNDP and other implementing organizations carry out. Even though the total volume of decentralized evaluations conducted across UNDP (241 evaluations) was similar to that reported in 2014 (244 evaluations), the number of countries conducting at least one evaluation decreased by 9 per cent compared to the same reporting period in 2014 (from 75 per cent of countries in 2014 to 66 per cent in 2015).

37. UNDP regional and policy bureaus conducted a total of nine evaluations, three of which received management responses. The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support completed four project evaluations, two of which were global UNDP-GEF project evaluations. The remaining five evaluations were carried out by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (one), the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (two) and the Regional Bureau for Arab States (one). The Regional Bureau for Africa and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific did not conduct evaluations in 2015.

38. The total UNDP budget for decentralized evaluation in 2015 can be estimated by tabulating the budgets of all decentralized evaluations carried out, as reported by bureaus and country offices to the Evaluation Resource Centre, and adding the estimated time allotment for evaluation-related activities of monitoring and evaluation advisers in the bureaus and country offices. In the past, only the decentralized budgets were reported, which underestimated total financial support to this effort, and could not be compared to Independent Evaluation Office budgets – which cover both general operating expenses and staff costs. When also taking into account staff time and related costs, UNDP spent an estimated $20.35 million on decentralized evaluation in 2015, representing approximately 0.39 per cent of overall UNDP expenditures (both regular and other resources). Adding in the expenditures from the Independent Evaluation Office ($7.8 million), the total expenditure of UNDP for independent and decentralized evaluations in 2015 is estimated at $28.2 million, or 0.55 per cent of the overall UNDP programme budget of $5.172 billion.

39. In accordance with UNDP policy, all evaluations included in evaluation plans are mandatory and require a management response. Of the 241 evaluations completed in 2015, 207 (86 per cent) had a management response, yielding 1,805 key follow-up actions. By the end of 2015, 21 per cent of the actions had been completed, 50 per cent were ongoing, and 1 per cent were no longer applicable. It was noted that 15 per cent of the planned key actions had already passed the indicated due dates, and 14 per cent did not have due dates clearly indicated.

40. Since 2011, country programme evaluation compliance has been measured at the end of the programme period and based on completion of all planned evaluations during the period. Of 26 country programmes concluded in 2015, 11 (42 per cent) were 'fully compliant' (90 to 100 per cent of all planned evaluations were completed); 15 (58 per cent) were 'partially compliant' (40 to

89 per cent of planned evaluations were completed); and none were 'not compliant', (less than 39 per cent of evaluations completed). The 26 concluded country programmes had a total of 411 planned evaluations, 351 of which were completed (85 percent). Of these, 332 (95 per cent) included a management response.

The United Nations Capital Development Fund and the United Nations Volunteers programme

41. UNCDF commissioned two programme evaluations in 2015: a midterm evaluation of the MicroLead programme supporting the expansion of savings-led microfinance, and a final evaluation of the YouthStart programme, fostering financial inclusion among young people. Both were focused on Sub-Saharan Africa. UNCDF began two additional evaluations: one of a local economic development programme targeting improved food security in Niger (known as 'PADEL') and another supporting the development of an inclusive finance system in Lao PDR ('MAFIPP').

42. The UNCDF evaluation unit provided methodological support to programme directorates in applying an internal programme assessment tool incorporating elements from evaluation good practice. The unit participated as a member of the three-organization UNEG/OECD-DAC external peer review of the evaluation function of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

43. Total UNCDF expenditure on evaluation was approximately $665,000, drawn from both regular ('core') and other ('non-core') resources. A shortage of regular resources curtailed plans for a third staff member in the unit and caused postponement of a planned thematic evaluation assessing the performance of the local development approach of UNCDF since 2005.

44. During 2015, UNV carried out three major decentralized evaluations relating to United Nations volunteers and volunteerism: *Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future*, *UNV's Online Volunteering Service*, and *The ECOWAS Volunteers Programme*. The UNV budget for evaluation totalled $483,000, drawn from regular and other resources, including special voluntary funds. In 2016, UNV plans to strengthen its evaluation capacity by adding an evaluation specialist post and a dedicated envelope of resources to carry out planned evaluations.

II. Budget and human resources

45. The Independent Evaluation Office estimates that 2015 expenditures for evaluations and other institutional activities totalled $7.85 million (not including 'shared General Operating Expenses'), of which $7.41 million came from regular resources and $439,565 from other resources. The Office again came close to fully utilizing of its allocation from the regular resources budget (99.8 per cent of its core funding), maintaining the trend from previous years (above 95 per cent). The total volume of expenditure declined 13 per cent from 2014, owing to a 6.2 per cent reduction in regular UNDP funding plus a further adjustment following the decision to create a financial reserve. In addition, at the beginning of 2015, a multi-year contribution agreement with the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation came to a close. The Office spent 86.1 per cent of its total general operating (non-post) budget of $3,159,444 on activities directly related to evaluations.

46. The total cost of work was the equivalent of approximately 0.16 per cent of the UNDP combined (regular and other resources) annual budget, which is understood to have remained stable in the region of $5 billion per year, though with a significant shift in balance towards other resources.

47. As of January 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office had 21 staff members, including 15 international professionals and six general service staff. In November 2015 a temporary appointment post was approved for one professional at the P3 level to strengthen the research function in support of evaluations. The Office had two P5 posts vacant for the second part of 2015, while the position of deputy director was filled by May. That situation put a heavy workload on existing staff and, in a few cases, affected the timeliness of deliverables. The Office utilized external consultants to support its work in conducting evaluations and other activities.

48. The Independent Evaluation Office strove to achieve gender parity. Staffing was slightly out of balance, with women making up 64.2 per cent of international professional filled posts (nine) and all of general service staff (six). There was general parity with respect to gender in recruiting consultants.

49. The Office is committed to promoting staff development. In addition to devoting 5 per cent of staff time to learning, it supported the participation of one staff member to obtain an international

finance diploma, two professionals in the first edition of the Leadership Programme, and one evaluator in the International Programme for Development Evaluation Training.

III. Evaluation planning, 2016-2017

50. Pursuant to Executive Board decision 2015/8, and building on an informal briefing to the Board in September 2015, this chapter presents the evaluation plan of the Independent Evaluation Office, 2016-2017, for consideration by the Board.

A. Thematic evaluations

51. During the period 2016-2017 the office will continue its planned series of thematic evaluations (three have commenced, and two are in the planning stages), as follows.

Anti-corruption

52. This evaluation will examine UNDP support to anti-corruption and transparency, accountability and integrity measures for equitable governance. It will assess relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability at the country level against the expectations in the strategic plan in terms of (a) changes in macro policies and awareness; (b) changes in capacities of state and non-state actors; and (c) improved governance quality.

53. The evaluation categorizes UNDP support to anti-corruption and governance integrity under three broad streams of activity: strengthening anti-corruption policies and institutions; addressing drivers of corruption; and bringing changes in governance practices. The evaluation will be presented to the Executive Board at its second regular session 2016.

Institutional effectiveness

54. The medium-term plan includes a thematic evaluation covering UNDP institutional effectiveness, which relates to chapter V (Transforming institutional effectiveness) of the UNDP strategic plan, 2014-2017. Recognizing that institutional effectiveness is important in both audit and evaluation functions, the Independent Evaluation Office and the Office of Audit and Investigations are conducting the assessment jointly, using both audit and evaluation methodologies and tools. This constitutes the first effort of UNDP to link evaluation and audit functions in this way. The objective is to assess the extent to which organizational measures taken have enhanced, or have the potential to enhance, the ability of UNDP to deliver higher-quality programming. The assessment will be presented to the Executive Board at its first regular session 2017.

Disabilities-inclusive development

55. The Office included an evaluation of the UNDP contribution to *disabilities-inclusive development* in its medium-term plan. In approving the plan for this evaluation, the Executive Board recognized the importance of ensuring that development support from UNDP includes and emphasizes assistance to poor and marginalized populations, in which the disabled are disproportionately included.

56. The work of UNDP relating to the rights and services for persons with disabilities will be considered through the four overarching principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: non-discrimination; participation and inclusion; accessibility; and accountability. These are at the core of the UNDP strategy and vision. The evaluation will consider the extent to which these principles are embraced within UNDP support to partner countries and the extent to which UNDP applies them in its own operations. It will assess results from direct support programing, and how UNDP is mainstreaming the rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities across its poverty alleviation, capacity-building, sustainable development, and resilience programming. It will also assess whether UNDP operational and staffing systems enable and support the contributions of persons with disabilities. This evaluation will be presented to the Executive Board at the first regular session 2017.

Strategic plan and global and regional programme evaluations

57. The evaluation plan, 2014-2017, identifies a series of evaluations to be carried out and presented to the Executive Board at its annual session 2017:

(a) Evaluations of the five UNDP regional programmes;
(b) Evaluation of the global framework for policy support, 2014-2017;
(c) Evaluation of the UNDP strategic plan, 2014-2017; and
(d) Evaluation of the UNDP contribution to South-South and triangular cooperation.

58. This series follows past practice, in that similar evaluations were carried out and presented to the Board at its annual session 2013. In the current plan period, the Office plans to condense and synthesize the work into two evaluations, one focused on the UNDP global and regional programmes, the other on the UNDP strategic plan. Both will be presented at the annual session 2017.

59. The *global and regional programmes* evaluation will combine the five regional programmes into one synthesis evaluation, together with an assessment of the UNDP global programme. The evaluation will consider operational and managerial as well as programmatic aspects, including: policy support; service delivery to country offices; cooperation with regional institutions; changing expectations of scope after the structural review; and resource mobilization.

60. The *strategic plan* evaluation will include a South-South cooperation module and will require a series of parallel assessments corresponding to the key outcomes delineated in the strategic plan. The primary objectives are to:

(a) Assess the performance of UNDP during the period covered by the strategic plan;
(b) Assess the usefulness of the strategic plan as a tool for guiding UNDP and managing its activities;
(c) Facilitate learning from UNDP experience during the strategic plan period; and
(d) Provide actionable recommendations with respect to UNDP overall strategy and the strategic planning process.

B. Assessments of development results

61. During the first half of 2016 the Independent Evaluation Office began six assessments of development results to be readied for consideration by the Executive Board in 2017. These cover Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico and Pakistan.

62. During 2017, the Office intends to carry out 10 more assessments (to be identified in collaboration with UNDP management) that will be ready for submission to the Executive Board in 2018, giving a total of 16 assessments for the 2016-2017 period.

C. Decentralized evaluation assessment

63. The Independent Evaluation Office recommends that the Executive Board consider a significant scaling-up of decentralized evaluation in 2016, an area of work that was largely suspended during the evaluation policy review process.

64. UNDP has a bifurcated evaluation system, with broad, thematic, programmatic and country-level evaluations carried out by the Independent Evaluation Office on the one hand, and decentralized evaluations commissioned by the programme units (policy and regional bureaus and country offices) on the other. The decentralized work, comprising 200 or more evaluations globally per year, is an important building block for accountability and learning, and a key element in UNDP evidence-based priority-setting, programming architecture, and decision-making.

65. In anticipation of revisions to the UNDP evaluation policy (DP/2011/3), an external review of the policy was carried out in 2014. The policy review noted a number of challenges and perceived weaknesses in the UNDP decentralized evaluation function. It highlighted inconsistencies in the management of decentralized evaluations and insufficient budgeting for this work, leading to concerns over impartiality, uneven quality, and variable utility.

66. In response to those findings, UNDP management decided to ramp up monitoring and decentralized evaluation support across the organization. It is launching a new global programme

called 'Strengthening UNDP country-level capacities for evaluation'. The programme includes four intended outputs:

(a) UNDP standards, business processes and tools in place to enable effective conduct of decentralized evaluation activities;
(b) Quality assurance mechanisms for effective support to decentralized evaluations established and functional in UNDP regional centres.
(c) Country office capacities and processes in place to design and undertake high quality evaluations; and
(d) Global UNDP initiative or project in support of national monitoring and evaluation capacities designed and approved.

67. In accordance with UNDP policy, the Independent Evaluation Office has the responsibility of setting evaluation standards for UNDP and assessing its evaluation work, including that of the associated funds and programmes. The Office: (a) sets evaluation standards for planning, conducting and using decentralized evaluations, and assesses the quality of evaluation reports; (b) disseminates methodology and good practice standards for evaluation management in UNDP; (c) provides a roster of evaluation experts; (d) supports a network of evaluation practitioners; and (e) maintains a public depository of evaluation resources to facilitate sharing of evaluative knowledge.

68. In 2015, the Office carried out these responsibilities, with the exception of the decentralized evaluation quality assessment work that was suspended in 2014 due to the weaknesses identified in the policy review. In particular, the review questioned the impartiality of some decentralized evaluations because of the manner in which they were commissioned and managed. The quality assessment system that the Office had in place was not sufficiently robust to focus on those issues.

69. The Office postponed revising the decentralized evaluation system in 2015, expecting that a revised evaluation policy would be approved by the Executive Board at its annual session clarifying roles and responsibilities for decentralized evaluation. Although a revised policy has yet to be approved by the Board, the Office will clearly have a central role in the decentralized evaluation function. It therefore intends move forward in 2016 to reinstitute an improved decentralized evaluation quality assessment system.

70. In August 2015 the Office informally presented to the Executive Board a strategy to strengthen and restart its decentralized evaluation work. The proposed strategy includes:

(a) Ex-ante reviews of country office evaluation plans;
(b) Upgrade and maintenance of the evaluation consultant roster;
(c) Upgrade and maintenance of the Evaluation Resource Centre;
(d) Comprehensive ex-post quality assessments of decentralized evaluation reports;
(e) Greater inclusion of UNCDF and UNV into the decentralized evaluation assessment system;
(f) Support to development of decentralized evaluation guidance and the evaluation-related sections of the UNDP handbook on planning, monitoring and evaluating for development results;
(g) Development and conduct of evaluation training for monitoring and evaluation focal points at headquarters, in regional bureaus and in country offices;
(h) Monitoring UNDP follow-up and implementation of evaluation recommendations; and
(i) Synthesis and meta-level assessment of decentralized evaluations, including synthesis of key lessons learned.

71. In line with the above strategy, the Office plans to use existing staff and consultants during 2016 to revise and renew its work in two of the above-listed activities:

(a) Quality assessment of all decentralized evaluations, including providing feedback to regional bureaus and country offices on suggestions for strengthening this work, and highlighting exemplary work; and
(b) Ex-ante reviews of country office evaluation plans, with recommendations on improving them to maximize learning.

72. Starting in 2017, the Office proposes to expand its decentralized evaluation work to cover the rest of the activities set out in the strategy. Doing so will require additional financial and human

resources, and the Office intends to reconfigure its workforce to create a dedicated sub-unit of three persons focused on decentralized evaluation. Meanwhile, some external donor funding ($0.300 million, from Switzerland) is anticipated in respect of Independent Evaluation Office support for decentralized evaluation in 2016.

D. National evaluation capacity

73. The biennial conferences held by the Independent Evaluation Office began with Morocco in 2009, followed by South Africa in 2011, Brazil in 2013 and Thailand in 2015. Plans call for the 5th national evaluation capacities conference, in 2017, to be held in the Europe and Central Asia region. After the Bangkok conference, government participants expressed interest in receiving UNDP support to: (a) establish evaluation units; (b) routinely include evaluation within results-based management system development, (c) set up monitoring and evaluation systems for tracking fulfilment of the sustainable development goals; and (d) adjust national development plans to the goals and build national capacities to evaluate their efforts towards the achievement of the goals. Building on the strategic approach taken in the past of broad cooperation with regional and other stakeholders, plans are being developed for the 5th national evaluation capacities conference. Meanwhile, external donor funding ($0.200 million, from Norway) has been secured to support formulation, testing and validation of a 'diagnostic guide' to help determine national evaluation capacity development needs and priorities.

IV. Costed programme of work, 2016

74. The costed programme of work of the Independent Evaluation Office for 2016 is based on a Board approved multi-year budget for 2015-2016 of $9.277 million per year. The Office of Financial Resource Management has allocated $6.738 million for the Office in 2016. This amount includes a 10 percent 'holdback reserve', as well $0.692 million for shared general operating expenses. The 2016 budget is $0.6 million less than the 2015 allocation. Additional funding from external sources should amount to $0.5 million in 2016. These budget reductions will leave a shortfall of nearly $1.4 million in 2016, necessitating commensurate changes in the work plan of the Office.

75. The Independent Evaluation Office estimates that its budget represents 0.16-0.18 per cent of the overall UNDP (core and non-core) budget. If total cost of decentralized evaluations is also factored in (as described in paragraph 38, above), the combined organizational funding for evaluation is in the region of 0.55 per cent of UNDP combined budget. The Office has urged UNDP to revise its budget for evaluation to reach a 1 per cent threshold for total evaluation expenditures, in line with the commitments being set by other United Nations organizations[1]. The proposed budgets for 2016 and 2017 are needed for the Office to revamp its decentralized evaluation work, increase its workload of country-level evaluations, and carry out the analysis needed for the regional and global programme and strategic plan evaluations due in 2017. The budget request is set out in table 1, below, and summarized in table 2.

[1] The 2014 Joint Inspection Unit assessment of the evaluation function in the United Nations system indicated that organizations dedicated between 0.5 and 3 per cent of their expenditures to evaluation, depending on the mandate, size and role of the function in the organization. WFP committed to 0.8 per cent in its recent policy revision. The United Nations Children's Fund, in its 2013 policy revision, stated that it would allocate a minimum of 1 per cent of overall programme expenditure on evaluation.

Table 1. Itemized, fully costed programme of work for 2016-2017 (estimates)				
		Year of submission to Board	$ 000	
			2016	2017
1. Governance and accountability				
Annual reports on evaluation	Annual report on evaluation, 2015	2016	40	
	Annual report on evaluation, 2016	2017		40
Evaluation advisory panel and peer review			200	200
	Total		240	240
2. Conduct of evaluations				
Assessments of development results	Assessments in 6 countries (Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, and Pakistan)	2016	900	
	Assessments in 10 countries (countries to be decided)	2018		1500
Thematic evaluations	Anti-corruption and governance integrity	2016	175	
	Institutional effectiveness (jointly with the Office of Audit and Investigations)	2017	290	
	Disabilities	2017	250	
	Strategic plan	2017	400	175
	Global and regional programmes	2017	300	125
	Next set of thematic evaluations (theme to be decided)	2018		500
	Thematic guidance and methods development		75	25
	Total		2390	2325
3. Support to decentralized evaluation				
	Quality assessments	2017	250	250
	Evaluation guidance and training		150	150
	Evaluation roster			40
	Evaluation Resource Centre		25	25
	Total		425	465
4. National evaluation capacity development				
	Bangkok National Evaluation Capacity conference (2015) follow-up		230	

	Support of pilot countries to national evaluation capacity development		60	
	National Evaluation Capacity conference 2017			200
	Total		90	200
5. Other activities				
Partnership and knowledge management	Professionalization, networks, staff capacity development		70	100
United Nations reform	UNEG secretariat		90	90
	Other UNEG activities		50	50
Independent Evaluation Office management	Administration support, office development and infrastructure		380	380
	Total – Other activities		590	620
	Subtotal		3935	3850
6. Staff salary and 'shared' general operating expenses (GOE)				
Staff salary and operating expenses	Regular resources salaries		4650	5000
GOE	Centralized payments		692	692
	Total costed programme of work, 2015-2016		9277	9351
Resources				
Additional funds	(Norway, Switzerland)		500	300
Required regular resources funding			8777	9342

Table 2. Summary of budget, 2016-2017

Total cost (in $ thousands)		
Resources	**2016**	**2017**
Regular resources funds allocated	7,429	*7,829*[2]
Additional funds	500	400
Total	7,929	*8,229*
Planned expenditures		
Fully costed programme activities	9,277	9,351
Shortfall	1,348	1,122

[2] The allocation of regular resources funding for 2017 has not been determined. This figure is provided to show the projected shortfall if the IEO is allocated the same amount of core funding in 2017 as it expects to receive in 2016.